DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 249 915 HE 017 825

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TITLE The Many Sides of Undergraduate Advisors.
PUB DATE Aug 84
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (92nd, Toronto, Canada, August 24-28, 1984).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Advising; *Career Counseling; Departments; *Faculty Advisers; Helping Relationship; Higher Education; Information Needs; *Student Needs; *Undergraduate Students

ABSTRACT

The roles of the adviser of undergraduate students are discussed. To orient the student to the department, pamphlets can be prepared to answer some of the student's basic questions. Considering academic schedules are an important function of the undergraduate adviser, who reviews course options and directions with the student. The student should be provided an opportunity to indicate changes in interests that have occurred since the previous meeting. The student's file should contain at least general ideas about postgraduation plans and a flexible time outline of preparation. Another advising function is career counseling. The departmental adviser should become familiar with special career counseling services available on the campus to which students should be referred for information on dates of required entrance examinations and application procedures. Communication with colleagues should be maintained to keep informed about those who have special knowledge on specific fields. Finally, the adviser may function in the role of a surrogate parent with some advisees, although the extent of responsibility should be clear to the adviser. Appended is a list of sample support course groups giving general suggestions on courses that should be taken by pre-law and pre-health sciences students. (SW)

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The Many Sides of Undergraduate Advisors

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HEOD 725

Paper presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, August, 1984

The Many Sides of Undergraduate Advisors

Among the demands placed on the time of undergraduate faculty, it can become easy to ignore the importance of advising functions. The typical promotion and tenure system of teaching, research, and service pays little attention to advising activities. It is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of these activities and thus they are not as carefully considered as are some of the other faculty activities. Keeping in mind the minimal data available on criteria for good advising, I will present suggestions on six major topics related to undergraduate advising. Not all of these areas will apply to all of you; some will need individual modification. These topics are intended as starting points toward increasing awareness of the many facets of the undergraduate advisor's activities.

Given time demands and sometimes heavy teaching loads, it is important to maximize the time spent with advisees. Some students, however, seem to have difficulty formulating questions. It is not that these students are uninterested in receiving assistance. They are confused and just don't know where to start. Thus, the advisor may be placed in the position of trying to elicit the student's interests. To do this, the advisor may need to cover a considerable range of topics before really discovering the major needs of that session. One method of alleviating this problem is the development of departmental pamphlets. I have brought a sample of what I mean and will discuss them in detail with those of you who have an interest in such a project.

These pamphlets do not need to be fancy or expensive. With a little discussion and thought, you can determine what the major

issues are which tend to arise in your department. When Mark Ware and I wrote the pamphlets which I have brought, we found that using a question for the title worked well for us. Our three pamphlets are entitled, "Now that I am a psychology major - what should I do?", "What can I do with a major in psychology?", and "What if I want to go to graduate school in psychology?" The first two of these pamphlets are appropriate for the student who has just become a psychology major. They provide information which can be used to help the student become oriented to the department. If the student has read these materials prior to meeting with the major advisor, there is a common basis of information and a focus for the initial meeting. It is important to keep such materials short and to the point. If they are exhaustive, the student is likely to view them as equivalent to the school's catalog and not read them. We had our pamphlets printed in different colors for ease of sorting and also to be able to suggest that a student read a certain color pamphlet. Although I don't have data to support this concept, it seemed that students might remember colors easier than pamphlet titles!

Once the student is oriented to both you and your department, you are ready for another of your many functions. Schedules are perhaps the most visable function of the undergraduate advisor. It is important to establish early in the advising relationship that you want to be more than just a signature on the pre-registration form. With some students, the role of the faculty advisor will be obvious. For others, it may be necessary to take time to discuss the reasons you want to go over course options and directions.

If the student persists in an attitude of wanting only a signature and no advice, it can be useful to have a form indicating that you were willing to provide advice and that the student was not interested in receiving it. By actually having the student sign such a form, you are accenting the importance you attach to the advising function as well as providing yourself with tangible evidence of your attempt to do so.

Although it may seem obvious to the advisor that a student needs to look over registration materials prior to the scheduled meeting with you, the student may not be aware of this fact. Thus, a few printed guidelines for students about preparation can save the advisor time. A short description of what the student should bring to the meeting and the basic preparation needed can be useful. Starting the schedule meeting with a sentence or two about the master plan for that student can both refresh your memory about the advisee and also give the student an opportunity to provide the advisor with any changes in interests which have occurred since the previous meeting. The student's file should contain at least general ideas about post-graduation plans and a flexible time outline of preparation for them.

This brings me to a third advising function - career counseling. Mark will be telling you about a specific course he has designed to assist in this function. I want to provide some general guidelines for the advisor on this topic. Time may need to be devoted to cajoling the student into considering more than one post-college goal. This time is best spent when the student is a new major; not with the second semester senior who is suddenly having a panic

attack about what to do in June!

Not all academic advisors are really equipped to be career counselors. We do, however, have the general information needed and can encourage advisees to seek additional sources as needed. Becoming familiar with both the student's interests and aptitude is a first step. For students who seem to have difficulty in making career choices, there is the university career or counseling center as a back-up. If the suggestion to go to such a center is made in such a way that it is viewed as a service for the student rather than just another hassle, it is more likely to be accepted. Once several career choices are located, the student's schedule can then be developed to include electives which support those multiple goals. As an advising aid, you may want to make a list of popular careers within your department and the needed support courses. This master list can then be scanned during the advising process.

Related to the career counseling function of the psychology advisor are the special advisors who are available on many campuses. The most typical special advisors are for pre-medicine and pre-law. If a university has a special orientation, there may be others as well as these. It can help the departmental advisor to become familiar with the types of services offered by these special advisors as well as their campus location and hours. Some advisees are best referred to these special advisors to obtain certain information directly. Of interest are dates of required entrance examinations, application procedures and dates, and general reference materials. The academic advisor may also want to get information

from these special advisors. Knowledge about required courses or courses which seem to be helpful in terms of admission test performance can assist effective advising.

This brings me to point five - the importance of communicating with your colleagues within your department. For the very small department, communication may be easy. As departments grow, however, it becomes easier to lose touch with the advising expertise and interests of your colleagues. If you find that certain issues seem to arise frequently in your advising role, it is important to communicate this information within your department. A discussion of these issues may lead to a range of methods for handling them. Perhaps a colleague has found some resources which you don't know but are useful in dealing with the issue. Keeping such open lines of intra-departmental communication about advising can also provide information about who does really well advising on certain topics. If you have an advisee who needs special information, you can then either consult that colleague or ask the colleague to see your advisee for one meeting. Such a system not only saves you time but also provides more comprehensive advising. Departments which garner reputations for good advising are more likely to maintain high enrollment as well as provide a service!

In addition to this type of intra-departmental communication, it is also helpful if you share information gotten at conventions which not all members have attended. Since some colleagues may be sensitive to suggestions that they don't know what they are doing, this type of sharing needs to be done carefully.

Departments which have good audiovisual equipment facilities

may want to expand their advising capacities through the development of media presentations. Depending on your needs, these tapes might be done internally by developing special student programs on such topics as career choices course descriptions or through the university's public relations department on a range of adivsing issues.

A final advising role I will briefly address is that of surrogate parent. The degree to which you function in this capacity will vary with advisor, institution, and individual student. Although thr student's parents are the ones who are generally viewed as being responsible for major problems as well as career decisions, the advisor is likely to be geographically closer and thus tends to function in the role of a surrogate parent with some advisees. It is important for the advisor, especially the novice, to have some internal guidelines about how far this responsibility goes. There are no specific rules which can be given on this topic. I am more interested in the advisor having an awareness of this function and how it can be used to the student's advantage. If the student comes to view the advisor in something of a parental role, that student may be more open with the advisor about concerns which can have an impact on academic performance. This knowledge may prove useful in the career advising process as well as in individual course selection. The advisor who knows the advisees on this close basis may also be in a better position to make referrals to the university's counseling center when they are needed. By making such a referral, the advisor can then proceed to work with the student about appropriate career goals while the student's personal needs are being met elsewhere.

The six advising functions I have addressed today are among the many activities of the undergraduate faculty member. Even if these functions are carried out well, they do not guarantee that the student will be able to find employment with a bachelor's degree in psychology. That type of guarantee is just not feasible. Good advising does, however, provide a strong foundation for that goal.

UNDERGRADUATE ADVISING

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1. Orientation
   - student needs
   - methods
2. Schedules
   - advisor role
   - student preparation
   - long-term
3. Career Counseling
   - when
   - resources
4. Special Advisors
   - who
   - uses
5. Intradepartmental Communication
   - colleague sensitization
   - open communication
   - audiovisuals
6. Surrogate Parents
   - guidelines
   - relation to career planning

SAMPLE SUPPORT COURSE GROUPS

Pre-law

accounting - at least the first course, possibly a second one

economics - one or two basic courses

speech - at least one public speaking course; enough courses to feel comfortable talking in front of a group

essay exam courses - the topic is not as important as the test style; exams should require integrative thinking rather than fact repetition

"law" courses - classes with "law" in the title do <u>not</u> receive added attention in the admission review

broad background of courses

Pre-health sciences

biology - at least a year of general biology

chemistry - at least a year of general chemistry and a year of organic chemistry

English - two courses in composition and grammar

math - course sequence at least through calculus

physics - at least a year of general physics

science and math courses - as many as possible while earning an "A" in most classes with a few "B" grades, more than 1 or 2 "C" grades suggest another career option

Regardless of goal, some schools have special course requirements. Check the catelog for any school which might be of interest. Admission test scores which are really low will probably negate even outstanding academic records.